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NEWS RELEASE

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Rep. Nethercutt asks National Guard to reconsider housing northern border troops in Canada

WASHINGTON – U.S. Rep. George Nethercutt (R-Wash.) has sent a letter to Brig. Gen. Lee Legowik, assistant adjutant general of the Washington Army National Guard, asking that the National Guard reconsider its decision to house soldiers stationed along the northern border in Canada, citing the economic boost that the citizen soldiers could provide to local economies of northeast Washington towns.

The text of the letter is below.

Dear General Legowik:

I have been contacted by a number of constituents concerned by a recent decision to house Army National Guard personnel, activated for monitoring the northern border, in Canadian hotels.

I understand that 24 soldiers are presently supporting the northern border mission for a period of up to six months, and had previously been housed in hotels in Colville, Republic, Metalline Falls and Omak.

I am informed that the decision to house these soldiers in Canadian motels was made out of concern for the safety of personnel driving late at night. I certainly appreciate the importance of ensuring the safety of all your personnel, and agree that roads along the northern border can be hazardous, particularly during the winter months. But I also believe that the National Guard has an obligation to procure services from within the United States, whenever possible. To do otherwise undercuts the strong support of taxpayers for the Guard, and creates an unnecessary source of friction between citizen-soldiers and the community. The Guard is at its best when it is out among our communities, demonstrating the patriotism and dedication of its personnel, and I would hope that this consideration would also be part of a reevaluation of this decision.

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As I am sure you are aware, several of the Washington state counties along the northern border are experiencing double digit unemployment. The temporary presence of Guard personnel assigned to border duties was welcomed in these communities as a small economic boost. Unfortunately, the transfer of these employees to Canadian lodging has been yet another blow to these struggling communities.

You should be aware that Border patrol agents from Spokane are expected to commute 180 miles, roundtrip to the northern border, on a daily basis. I certainly wouldn't advocate such a commute for Guard personnel, but I raise this point to illustrate that other agencies have not resorted to housing their personnel outside of the United States, despite the distances involved in staffing northern border posts.

I strongly encourage reconsideration of this decision and would welcome an opportunity to work with you to devise a solution that allows these personnel to continue to be lodged in the United States.

Best regards.

Cordially,

George R. Nethercutt, Jr.
Representative in Congress

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